**Nile Basin Development Challenge**

**Template for the most significant change story 2012**

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| Project | NBDC N5 |
| Title | Thematic areas as incentives for survival of platforms |
| Author(s) | Kees Swaans; Tilahun Amede |
| Domain | Change of approach (the way we interact with our partners to generate evidence for policy advocacy and influence for the national platform and beyond) |
| Story | The Challenge Program for Water and Food (CPWF) jointly identified ‘Rainwater management strategies’ as a development challenge for the Nile BDC. Among the initial Nile BDC partners – mainly research organizations and universities – there were differing definitions about rainwater management, but there was consensus that it mainly revolved around land and water management and that the involvement of other actors was necessary to have an impact on development. Hence, a National platform was established in April 2011 to create a forum for improved interaction and communication in the area of land and water management, with a focus on rainwater at landscape scales. It was strongly supported by a wide range of organizations, not the least by the Ministry of Agriculture.  Stakeholders with a stake in natural resource management, representing the government, research, NGO/CBOs, private sectors, and donors, became members of the platform. However, the diversity in actors in terms of type, scope of operation and competencies was also represented in their views on landscape management and variable priorities. These interests include erosion management, drought management, revegetation of landscapes, crop-livestock systems, irrigation, soil and water conservation, climate change, land tenure policies etc. The original narrow concept held by research of strategies directly related to management of rainwater was challenged. Rain water management depends on many interlinked processes and management strategies related to water, land, and natural resource management. We were forced to broaden the concept and adapt a holistic system perspective, but at the same time it was important to keep members engaged and to entertain them for the common good. This has been played out in two ways: a) through the establishment of thematic working groups, and b) through creating workshop forums, which entertains topics of interest in rotation as they emerge.  Thematic working groups were created with support of the steering committee, reflecting major interest groups. Terms of Reference were developed and responsibilities shared. While the steering committee remains responsible for the overall direction and functioning of the national platform, the thematic working groups are expected to generate evidence for policy advocacy and influence for the national platform and beyond. Four groups were established - around 1) technological innovation, 2) institutional innovation, 3) policy support, and 4) climate change and resilience. Key persons representing government, university or NGOs were asked to chair a core group of different types of organizations (i.e. government, universities/research, NGOS, etc.), to identify peers to join the core group and to develop an action agenda. Groups are in essence fluid, although each working group has some core members to drive their activities.  In June and July of 2012, meetings were organised with the core teams of the Thematic Working Groups to develop an action agenda based on commonly identified key problematic areas or challenges. The ideas and planned activities were presented during the national platform meeting held in July for feedback, while giving members the opportunity to express in which groups they are interested. The thematic working groups will organize at least two learning events a year – in between the national platform meetings – to identify lessons learned, as well as key constraints and opportunities. Outcomes of these events will be published in communiqués, and results will be fed back into the national platform.  In addition to the thematic working groups, we have facilitated forums to entertain particular topics of interest within the broader grouping of thematic groups. For instance, the third national platform in July 2012 was organized in collaboration with ICRAF and dealt with revegetation of landscapes, which is a cross cutting thematic area across the groups. This arrangement is expected to link initiatives, reduce duplication of efforts, reduce number of workshops and facilitate joint action around the challenge of NRM, from different angles (trees, water, soils, institutions). We were setting examples on how a single platform could be used to capitalise on what is discussed in earlier meetings, fill critical gaps and suggest comprehensive strategies. Other institutions like FAO have also used the platform for their final meeting on agricultural water solutions.  **What is remarkable or interesting about this?**   * The emergence of thematic working groups and workshop forums, not planned, as a response to demand of national platform members to accommodate the needs of various disciplines * The narrow understanding research had on ‘rainwater management systems’ – i.e. mainly dealing the eth management of rain water as such – and the need to broaden this concept for the interest of development partners from various decisiplines * The change in institutional dynamics over time, from university dominated to NGO/government dominated forum * How it became an incentive to hold the platform members together; other platforms die even before they start; unless huge money is pumped into it. * The interest institutions show to use the platform as it brings the various actors and desciplines together; became a glue * The future role; how it could be exploited to serve as a knowledge and evidence generating tool   **What constraints remain**   * Incentives to sustain it with the available resources; need for resources for facilitation * Getting national champions to keep it going after NBDC * Institutionalization of the platform as an action wing of the ministry |
| Lessons | **List the lessons here**   1. Thematic working groups and workshop forum provide a mechanism for actors to identify themselves with the overall goals and objectives of a national platform. The diversification into themes makes it easier for actors to align themselves with specific goals, concrete activities, and tangible outputs, with the platform serving as a mechanism for advocacy and support at the broader national level. 2. It remains a challenge to find a balance between involving key persons to lead the groups with an overall overview of the thematic area and the position and authority to mobilize others and technical people who have the time to drive the activities. 3. The broadening of topics beyond rainwater also creates a challenge to make sure that we are staying focussed 4. The groups need initial support in terms of facilitation, logistics, communications, which requires institutional backing. 5. Communication between members of the thematic working groups is a challenge as they may be dispersed over the country, from different type of organizations, and capacity. |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?**   1. Support from steering group members, which made it possible to involve key people 2. Themes closely related to topics of NBDC, which made buy in from staff member of NBDC, as well as support staff an important factor. |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?**   1. Difficult to maintain momentum, with limited resources to support and backstop this process. 2. In some groups diversity in opinions of what needs to be done to address identified issues; needs good facilitation |
| Process | **Why and how was this story selected?** |